

The SocioFillmore Project: Frame Semantics for Critical Analysis of Societal Perspective Taking

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Different linguistic expressions can conceptualize the same event from different viewpoints by emphasizing certain participants over others. Semantic frames as proposed by Fillmore (Fillmore, 1985, 2006) are a helpful theoretical and practical device for modeling linguistic perspective-taking. In this contribution, we will bridge the gap between the cognitive-linguistic notion of framing and the societal/discourse analytic notion of framing.

To do this, we go back to Fillmore (1985)'s idea of *U-semantics* ('semantics of understanding'), in which frames are not just lexicographical or analytic entities, but interpretative devices that play a central role in the language understanding process. In particular, Fillmore sketches out an inferential thought process that is in some ways analogous to Gricean pragmatic inference, yet takes place on the level of conventional meaning: language interpreters continuously implicitly ask themselves why the speaker would choose one linguistic form over another, and why the linguistic categories represented by these forms exist in the first place. We propose extending these questions with a social-critical dimension: taking meaning to be grounded not only in cognition but also in society, we ask what a speaker's choice for one linguistic form over another tells us about their societal viewpoint on the scene that is being envisioned.

Within this theoretical framework, we propose a methodology for analyzing how societal power imbalances and in/out-group relationships (e.g., between men and women, immigrants and non-immigrants, car drivers and pedestrians) are reflected in language use, based on an analysis of semantic frames and roles as encoded in FrameNet together with syntactic construction annotations. In our contribution we will show our work of applying this methodology to analyzing news reporting of gender-based violence (femicide), road danger (car crashes), and migration.

Finally, we will discuss the suite of computational tools that we have developed around our theoretical approach: we make use of frame semantic parsing to analyze and make accessible corpora of newspaper text linked to event metadata and provide an interactive toolkit for prototyping event-based social frame analysis, released as the SocioFillmore web app. Our toolkit is multilingual but for now focuses on Italian, English, and Dutch. This toolkit is then the basis for follow-up work that goes beyond frame analysis and looks at how different linguistic choices can influence perception of responsibility for gender-based violence, and tries to computationally model this both from an analytic (predict perception scores given a text) and synthetic (generate alternative framings of the same event) perspective.

References

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